

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINS, NU
SUBJECT: SPANISH CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND U.S. NUNS BEATEN BY THE GN

SUMMARY: TWO SPANISH CATHOLIC PRIESTS AND THREE U.S. NUNS HAVE BEEN BEATEN BY THE NATIONAL GUARD (GN) IN RECENT DAYS IN A POOR SUBURB OF MANAGUA CALLED OPEN-3. THE GON CONSIDERS THEM POLITICAL ACTIVISTS BUT THEY CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO BE ADVOCATES OF CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE AND CONFLICT MODERATORS. END SUMMARY.

1. THERE HAS BEEN HEIGHTENED POLITICAL TURMOIL IN THE PAST WEEK IN THE OPEN-3 SUBURB OF MANAGUA WHICH IS POPULATED MAINLY BY POOR WORKER FAMILIEIS. PART OF THE TURMOIL HAS ARISEN OVER A LONG-STANDING COMPLAINT OVER MISERABLE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES BETWEEN THE SUBURB AND THE CITY. THE RESIDENTS HAD OBTAINED ABOUT TWO MONTHS AGO AGREEMENT FROM THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION BOARD THAT IT WOULD STUDY REQUESTED IMPROVEMENTS IN THE SERVICE. AS NOTHING HAD HAPPENED THE RESIDENTS DECIDED TO MOUNT A PROTEST MARCH ON THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMY. THIS TOOK PLACE ON DECEMBER 20. DURING THE SAME WEEK IN AN OSTENSIBLY UNRELATED DEVELOPMENT STUDENTS OCCUPIED THE OPEN-3 CHURCH TO DEMAND AMNESTY FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS (SEPTTEL).

2. US CITIZEN MARYKNOLL NUNS WHO LIVE IN OPEN-3 DIRECTLY IN FRONT
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OF THE CHURCH HAVE BEEN VERY MUCH INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAMS AND, IN PARTICULAR, THE TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM. THREE OF THEM PARTICIPATED IN THE DECEMBER 20 PROTEST MARCH WHICH LED TO THE GON INFORMALLY ADVISING THE EMBASSY THAT THEY WERE JEOPARDIZING THEIR STATUS IN THE COUNTRY BY PARTICIPATING IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES.

3. ON THE EVENING OF DEC. 20 THE GN ATTEMPTED TO BREAK UP A CROWD

IN FRONT OF THE OCCUPIED CHURCH USING TEAR GAS. THE THREE NUNS AND A SPANISH PRIEST WERE STANDING IN FRONT OF THE HOUSE OPPOSITE THE CHURCH. THE CROWD DISPERSED RAPIDLY WITH THE GN IN PURSUIT. ACCORDING TO THE NUNS, WITH WHOM THE AMBASSADOR AND POLOFF MET ON DECEMBER 21, THEY TRIED TO URGE CALMNESS ON THE PEOPLE, BOTH RESIDENTS AND GN. IN RESPONSE ALL FOUR WERE HIT HARD WITH RIFLE BUTTS LEADING TO VARIOUS BRUISES AND A SCALP WOUND TO ONE OF THE NUNS. HER PICTURE WITH BANDAGE APPEARED ON THE FRONT PAGE OF LA PRENSA THE SAME DAY. ANOTHER SPANISH PRIESTS HAD BEEN KICKED BY A GN TROOP THE DAY BEFORE WHEN HE TRIED TO MODERATE A CONFLICT BETWEEN RESIDENTS AND THE GN.

4. THE NUNS SAY THEY ARE OPPOSED TO THE CHURCH OCCUPATION AND HAVE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH IT EXCEPT TO TALK WITH SOME OF THE DEMONSTRATORS AND URGE ORDER AND RESPECT FOR THE CHURCH PROPERTY. NEVERTHELESS, THE COINCIDENCE OF THE TWO ISSUES APPEARS TO HAVE LEFT THE GON THINKING THE CHURCH OCCUPATION, WHICH CLEARLY IS POLITICALLY MOTIVATED, AND THE TRANSPORTATION PROTEST ARE LINKED AND THE NUNS ARE INVOLVED IN BOTH.

5. IN AN UNOFFICIAL CALL BY CHARGE AND POLOFF ON NEW ECONOMICS MINISTER BLANDON ON DECEMBER 22, HE INDICATED HE WOULD PLACE THE TRANSPORTATION PROBLEM WHICH CAUSED THE PROTEST BY OPEN-3 RESIDENTS AT THE TOP OF HIS AGENDA.

6. COMMENT: IN SEVERAL INFORMAL CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN EMBOFFS AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GON OFFICIALS, THE LATTER HAVE MADE NO ATTEMPT TO JUSTIFY THE BRUTALITY INFLICTED ON THE PRIESTS AND NUNS OR THE RESIDENTS OF OPEN-3. THEY ARE UPSET OVER WHAT THEY BELIEVED TO BE FOREIGNERS BEING INVOLVED IN POLITICAL PROTEST ACTIVITIES. EMBOFFS HOPEFULLY HAVE CONVINCED THEM THESE ARE TWO SEPARATE ISSUES AND THE NUNS HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE CHURCH OCCUPATION.
RUBENSTEIN

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